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EDITORIAL NOTES

The analysis of the present situation in secondary education made in previous editorials has brought us to the point where we may attempt to suggest practicable ways of securing relief and of making real progress possible. At the outset we asserted that the fundamental thing to be aimed at was a transfer of control to the secondary school as the first condition for an experimental reconstruction of the secondary-school curriculum. As has been suggested before, we shall never know what that curriculum ought to be unless we gain the initial freedom to try to find out. Any schematic readjustment of control will mean merely the substitution of one kind of dogmatism for another. Manifestly, therefore, the task is to find the points at which the secondary school finds the external control especially hampering and, if possible, to show that the colleges may with safety relax their demands at these points and that the secondary schools can assume the responsibilities thus handed over to them.

Without aiming to be exhaustive, we may name three points at which the pressure of the colleges is felt by the secondary schools: (1) the prescribing of the total admission requirements; (2) the specific requirement in any admission subject; (3) the method of testing the pupils' preparation. In passing to the discussion of these three points we may say by way of preface that preparation for college in the accepted sense of the term is an educational anachronism. Let there be no misunderstanding as to my meaning. Of course, the four years' work of the secondary school should and must serve as a preparation for the subsequent four years' work in college. But there is a vast difference between first deciding what the college course is to be and then prescribing a secondary-school curriculum that will make that college course feasible, and doing in the secondary school that which meets the real human needs of the pupils and then leaving to the colleges the duty and privilege of carrying out this educational process to its natural results.

The first relief measure, then, is to reduce the total admission requirement; not because the average pupil may not accomplish the work, but because, if he does accomplish it, no time or opportunity is left to pursue lines of work and study that may be vastly better for him just at this period of his life. It is no answer to this objection to the present status to point out that the pupil has a large range of optional or elective studies. Consult any college catalogue and you will see that these electives or optional studies are usually grouped

for the student by the college and that in any case they are themselves carefully defined and prescribed as to amount, content, etc. The result is plain and undeniable. The adviser of a pupil preparing for college is forced to consult college catalogues, plan the pupil's studies within the limits set by the college, and then adhere to the plan at the sacrifice of any other educational considerations. This is not the place to enter into a proof that these grouping are the results of compromises between different interests or views within the colleges themselves, or that they have not been arrived at in any scientific way by careful study of when and in what amounts or how these subjects should be pursued, singly or in groups. This history is plain to anyone who will take the trouble to read it. The point that I am making is that *all* of the four years' work is thus provided for. My plea is this, that the colleges content themselves for the present with a smaller total specified requirement to the end that the secondary school and the pupil may have a fair portion of the time to be used in an educational way for the pupil. I do not urge that the total requirement be reduced, although there is something to be said for such a consideration, but that the total *specified* requirement be so diminished. To make my suggestion more concrete, I would urge that all colleges in the country so remodel their entrance requirements as to demand but three-fourths of their present specified subjects and leave to the secondary school without qualification the determination and selection of the remaining one-fourth. If a college is now requiring sixteen units for entrance, let it prescribe in any grouping that it may deem wise twelve units and then add "any four additional units approved and certified to by the preparatory or high school." This is not a great deal to ask. The college can thus get a grouping with meaning and one that will lead up to college work. But the significant result would be that the secondary school would at once realize that one-fourth of its curriculum could be the subject of investigation and experiment. It could offer any subject, at any time, in any quantity, and by any method. It would have a real educational opportunity and responsibility; and it would show itself worthy.

The second relief measure is to reduce the specific requirement in the different subjects. Here again, it is not the design to reduce the time

2. REDUCE THE REQUIREMENT WITHIN THE SUBJECTS given to a subject offered for admission to college, nor to provide an easy way of entering college. If a subject is now accorded a year's time or a unit's value, let the time be unchanged. But the suggestion is that the amount specified be materially reduced. Let there be a *minimum* set for each subject, and if the college admits only on examination let the examination be on this minimum. The reason for this recommendation is similar to that urged in favor of the preceding one; the secondary school and the pupil must have more leeway. It is not clear that four books of Caesar form a better year's work than three, or that six orations of Cicero should always be covered by

every class, or that two hundred pages of easy German mark the lower limit for the work of an average class. It is quite conceivable in many cases, and certain in others, that the present specific requirement prevents a higher character of work. At any rate, the setting of a minimum considerably lower than that at present in force would give to the secondary school that indispensable freedom to experiment with the content and method of the separate subjects that alone will make the work educational.

The third relief measure is to accord to the secondary school the right to recommend pupils to college as a right. I am not going to enter into a rehearsal of the time-honored arguments for and against the examination system. That pupils are admitted to college on certificate and on examination and that the colleges who adopt the different methods are convinced that the one or the other is the better is pretty well known. My reason for bringing up the matter in this connection is that I may point out why the examination system as now practiced interferes with the educational work of the secondary school and therefore should be superseded. In order to do so, I should like to distinguish between two uses of the examination which from an educational point of view are radically different. An examination given by a teacher who has worked with a pupil is a legitimate means of revealing the pupil to himself, of making clear to him just how definite his knowledge is, how well he has it organized and how well he can express himself under the conditions of time and material determined by the examination itself. This sort of an examination given with the clear understanding on the part of teacher and pupil of its real value and purport cannot be employed too much. It need not become a means of mental torture or a bugbear to the most delicate pupil; in fact, it can be made a source of real pleasure and of genuine growth. But it must be kept thus a means, and not allowed to become an end. The other kind of examination is one that is given, like our college-entrance examinations, under conditions that weigh it down with a purely adventitious value; it is a test, coming at the close of a long period of work, in a very small portion of that work, and it is interpreted, not, as it ought logically to be interpreted, merely as an index of what the pupil knows about the particular subject-matter of the examination, but as a proof of how little or how much he knows of all that he has studied of the subject. And in addition, this snapshot test for the pupil becomes the weightiest factor in deciding whether he is to go on to college or remain in the secondary school another year, only to prepare himself again to stake all on the outcome of a few hours' work. And when one sees what the character of these tests is, as Professor Hale brought it out in the last number of the *School Review*, one may feel safe in denouncing them as utterly unfair. Now the point I wish to make is that an examination set by the college may be and probably is considered by the college a means of determining the adequacy of the pupil's preparation on a definite

**3. ADMIT ON THE
RECOMMENDATION
OF THE SCHOOL**

day for taking up the work of the college, but for the secondary teacher and the secondary pupil all through the period of preparation the examination is an *end*, the chief end of the work of the school. It is idle to reply that this is not necessarily so. The fact is that it is so, and when one recalls all that the examination is made to mean for the pupil it seems fair to conclude that it is necessarily so. Let the colleges, therefore, turn over the work of testing pupils to the secondary schools who alone are capable of performing the work so as to make of it an educational instrument. In this way, the secondary school will be relieved of an irrelevant task and will be permitted to have an eye single to the great educational task that it is set to perform. The secondary school is able and willing to assume the responsibility for the preparation of its pupils. If it is allowed to act as if it were responsible, it will become so. At any rate, no other institution or set of men can in any way wrest this responsibility from it.

These suggestions have been made with the desire to be practical and in the belief that they are feasible. That they are moderate under the circumstances seems clear. Whether they will appeal to others remains to be seen. But whatever attention may be accorded them, it is beyond question that the demand behind them is a real and insistent one. Those who desire with the writer that our educational system, resting as it does on co-operation of all interested in and intrusted with this great work, shall not suffer unnecessary disturbance and consequent waste will seek a way of meeting this demand. But whatever we may decide as to ways and means, the secondary school is going to come into its own for the sake of the young who find through it their entrance into life.

*THE GROWING
FREEDOM
OF THE
SECONDARY SCHOOL*

W.B.O.